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Evidence from Documentary Records and Materials from Shipwrecks of the 9th-10th Centuries

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# Sri Vijaya as the Entrepôt for Circum-Indian Ocean Trade

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## NOTE DE L'AUTEUR

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- 1 China's engagement in maritime trade was initiated during the second half of the 8th century, developed rapidly in the 9th century and attained its first "peak" in the 10th century. Chinese cargoes were shipped to many locations around the Pacific and Indian Ocean, and the quantity of goods transported reached very high levels which were largely maintained for the next five centuries specially on the official related trade to its new level (Qin Dashu 2007a). It would be left to the renowned admiral Zheng He, in the 15th century, to bring Chinese maritime trade to its next peak. Research on this ancient trading system depends mainly on ancient documentary accounts and archaeological finds, and this research is vital for understanding the trading models developed for circum-Southern China Sea and Indian Ocean trade.

## The characteristics of Chinese export items during the 9th-10th centuries

- 2 During these two centuries, export commodities mostly comprised silk items, as recorded in many ancient documentary accounts but rarely preserved as artifacts, as well as ceramics which have been found in large quantities as a result of extensive archaeological work. On the basis of the investigation and study of many ancient archaeological sites, we can conclude in summary that the main characteristics of export ceramics in the 9th century was that the quantities of ceramic items being exported had undergone the transition from small to large quantities that is, from trying to find out what kind of products the users of different destinations were fond of, gradually *set a mode* that shipped different products to different destinations. In the period from the 9th to the 11th century, export ceramics were produced at many major kilns in both southern and northern China. Scholars have demonstrated that the most important of these included Changsha Wares (fig. 1), Yue Ware celadon, Xing Ware white porcelains and Guangdong celadon (Ma Wenkuan 1993; Guy 2001-2002:17). Among these, we are familiar with the places manufacturing Changsha Ware and Yue Ware celadon.
- 3 However, among the so called Xing Ware white porcelains, some were made at the Xing kilns (fig. 2) as well as early Ding Wares in today's Hebei Province, but the major part were products of the Huangye and Baihe kilns in today's Gongyi City in Henan Province. In addition, some tricolor (*sancal*) wares found in the sites in Middle East and Japan were produced at the Gongyi kilns. Among the wares in the cargo salvaged from the early 9th century Belitung wreck in Jawa Sea, Indonesia, scholars have discovered some white glazed with green splashes wares, their characteristic being that the green splashes were applied to a large area of the surface compared to the same type of wares produced in the Cizhou kilns in later period, some of them appeared in a manner similar to the application of glaze with green glaze wares (Xie Mingliang 2002; Guy 2005:15-17). There is a long-standing dispute on where in China such wares had been produced. As recent research shows, both the Gongyi and Xing kilns produced such white glazed with green splashes wares, and the Belitung finds should include products of these two kilns. In addition to these two, the Xiangzhou kiln in Anyang, Henan Province has also been suggested as being another possible place of manufacture (Qin Dashu 2007c:322-325). In addition, a small number of Yaozhou green wares had also been found at the Fustat site near Cairo in Egypt (Scanlon 1970:185-192).<sup>1</sup> These producers of export porcelain in North China were all distributed in places under governmental control from the capital Chang'an to Yangzhou in the late Tang period (9th century), and all these types of wares had been discovered in Yangzhou, suggesting that they were exported from the port in that city.

Fig. 1. Changsha ware shards excavated from Fustat, Egypt.



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MR. YUBA TADANORI

Fig. 2. Xing Ware white glazed tea cup stand, unwatered from Belitung shipwreck



### Photographed by author

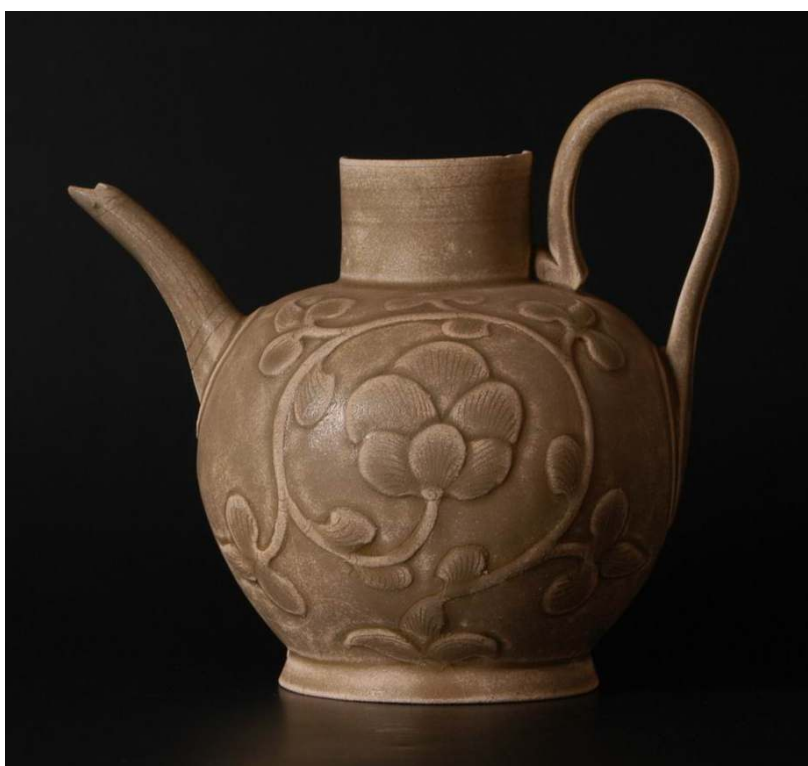
- 4 Celadon wares from Guangdong are relatively complex, when compared with celadon items from other regions. There seems to be no discoveries of 8th century kiln sites in Guangdong, although there are more than 20 kiln sites from the 9th and 10th centuries. These include the Beiditou kiln site in Chao'an County, the Guanchong kiln site, the Gaoming kiln site in Xinhui County in eastern Guangdong and the Shuiche kiln site in Meixian County in north-eastern Guangdong. The wares from the Shuiche kilns are exquisite (fig. 3), while those from the other kilns are coarser in quality (Gu Yunquan 1985:11). In addition, analysis of the wares unearthed from the site of the Korokan (Department for the Reception of Foreign Emissaries) near Fukuoka City in Japan reveals products from the Wuzhou and Taizhou kilns in Zhejiang Province, as well as from the Yixing kilns in Jiangsu Province (Chang Lan 2001). It seems that during this initial stage, export porcelain came from many places in both southern and northern China, and the kilns involved in this production all exported their fine quality and decorated products, suggesting that during this stage Chinese potters continued to test which kind of products were suited to the taste of different potential consumers in different countries. There were not yet kilns exclusively producing export wares, only the Changsha kiln mainly produced for overseas market due to its location and characteristics of products.
  
- 5 By the 10th century, with the decline of the Changsha kiln, Yue Ware celadon from Zhejiang Province became the most important export porcelain (fig. 4), besides small quantities of Fanchang white ware from Anhui Province and Xinmi City white ware from Henan Province (fig. 5), which reflected in cargo of the 10th century Cirebon shipwreck located in Jawa Sea, Indonesia (Qin Dashu 2007b). This indicates that by the 10th century the most active ports were Mingzhou (current Ningbo City) in Zhejiang Province and Guangzhou although Yangzhou port continued to be used. From the late 11th century, porcelains made in northern China are fewer among overseas archaeological discoveries, and by the 12th century, they have disappeared in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. In this interim period, a large number of kilns specifically producing export ceramics had appeared in the southeastern coastal area, mainly in Fujian and Guangdong Provinces.

**Fig. 3. Shuiche kiln celadon ewer and bowls unwatered from Belitung shipwreck**



**PHOTOGRAPHED BY AUTHOR**

**Fig. 4. Yue Ware celadon ewer unwatered from Cirebon shipwreck**



**PHOTOGRAPHED BY MR. ADI AGONG**



- 6 The finds of Chinese export porcelain in Southeast Asia and the West, as noted above, show that during 9th-10th centuries, there were many ports in the coast of China engaged in maritime trade. Export cargoes included silk, ceramics, raw materials such as lead, tin and silver, and copper currency (Twitchett 2004:383-432). The most important ports for export trade in this period were: Yangzhou, Mingzhou, Fuzhou and Guangzhou. However, these ports were not necessarily involved in exporting commodities directly to all destinations, and there were a number of entrepôts in the Indian Ocean trading circle. Cargo from ports in China could be transported firstly to these entrepôts and then loaded onto ships coming from other parts of the Indian Ocean for onward shipping. One important entrepôt in the 9th and 10th centuries was most possibly Pelambang, the capital of the Kingdom of Sri Vijaya on the island of Sumatra.

## Ancient records of maritime links and close relations between China and Nanhai (Southeast Asia to West Asia) Counties<sup>2</sup>

Fig. 5. White glazed vase of Xiguan kiln, Xinmi City, Henan Province unwatered from Cirebon shipwreck



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MR. ADI AGONG

- 7 Before the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), there were few documentary records about early shipping activities. A few records were mainly about monks traveling to the West in pursuit of Buddhist sutras, and some treated diplomatic missions to foreign countries. After the Tang Dynasty, fuller accounts of maritime travel appeared, including the important *Da Tang Xiyu qifu gaoseng zhuan* (*Tales of the Hierarchs Seeking Buddhist Sutras in*

*the Western Regions during the Tang Dynasty*) written by Yijing<sup>3</sup>. According to scholars, this book recorded the expeditions and experiences of Buddhist pilgrims and scholars to the Nanhai (Southeast Asia to West Asia) and India between the 15th year of the Zhenguan reign of Emperor Tang Taizong (641 CE) and the second year of the Tianshou reign of Empress Wu Zetian (691 CE). Within these 50 years, 57 people (including Yijing) made the journey as part of 33 separate expeditions. Among those journeys, four persons (comprising four groups) traveled by unknown routes, while 18 persons in 12 groups and 34 persons in 21 groups traveled to India by land and by sea, respectively. The ratio of sea to land voyages was 2.3:1, and the ratio of the number of persons traveling by sea to those traveling by land was 1.9:1. Yijing himself went to India by sea and studied Buddhist doctrine there for more than a decade. On his return to China, he had stayed in Sri Vijaya (Pelambang in Sumatra) for eight years to translate Buddhist Sutras and write (Wu Yugui 2002:1753). Obviously, the sea-route was also greatly developed when land transportation (silk road) was booming in the second half of the 7th century. However, the second half of 7th part of the treatise on “Geography” (*Dili zhi*) in volume 43 of *Xin Tang shu* (New History of Tang Dynasty) says:

During the Tianbao reign (742-755 CE), Emperor Xuanzong asked about the distances of the neighboring vassal states, and Wang Zhongsi, the head of the Honglu-Si (Department for the Reception of Foreign Emissaries), responded by presenting Xiyu Tu (An Illustrated Record of the Western Regions), which only recorded no more than twenty countries. Later, Jia Dan, Prime Minister during the Zhenyuan reign (785-804 CE), studied Chinese territory as well as the routes and distance most elaborately, and ‘recorded all places and routed leading from bordering districts to foreign countries according to the reports of foreign diplomatic missions and Chinese diplomatic missions to foreign countries translated by the Honglu-Si.’<sup>4</sup>

- 8 These two records suggest that although the ancient Chinese already had close maritime connections with India, Western Asia and even countries as far away as the Middle East, most connections among individuals were infrequent before the full flourishing of the Tang Dynasty. Only during the later stage of the Tang (from the second half of the 8th century to the 9th century), do official records about foreign contacts greatly increase, as recorded, for example, by Jia Dan, an official of the late Tang period. Jia Dan, whose sobriquet was Dunshi, succeeded in the Ming Jing Imperial Examination during the Tianbao reign (742-755 CE). During the reigns of three Tang emperors Suzong, Daizong and Dezong, he held a series of important positions — Prefectural Governor of Fenzhou, Honglusi (Department for the Reception of Foreign Emissaries) Officer, Prefectural Governor of Liangzhou, and Military Commissioner of Shannan Xidao. In the 9th year of Zhenyuan (793 CE), during the reign of Emperor Tang Dezong, he was appointed Prime Minister.
- 9 Jia Dan was addicted to reading throughout his life, especially on the subject of geography. He had surveyed personally the Guanzhong Dao (around current Shaanxi), Shannan Dao (about Central plain and middle reaches of Yangtze River) prefectures. Taking advantage of his position as head of the Honglusi, he collected extensive topographic materials from ethnic minorities, emissaries and ambassadors, and produced many geographical records and maps. Among the many important geographical works which he compiled throughout his life are:

- *Huanghua sida ji* (*Routes Leading Abroad from China*) in 10 juan (volumes),



- 40 volumes of *Gujin junquo xiandao siyi shu* (*Topography of Shire, State, County, and Prefecture Before Tang and Tang China*),
  - 6 volumes of *Guanzhong longyou shannan jiuzhou bielu* (*Topographical Records on Guanzhong, Longyou, Shannan and Other Nine Prefectures*),
  - 10 volumes of *Zhenyuan shidao lu* (*Topographical Records on Ten Prefectures in Zhenyuan Reign of Tang Dynasty*),
  - 4 volumes of *Tubo huanghe lu* (*Record of Tibet and Upre Yellow River Reaches*),
  - as well as 10 volumes of “Maps”<sup>5</sup>.
- 10 These works collectively represented the level of geographical science of the time and comprehensively reflected the status of sea transportation. Unfortunately, almost all of these works have been lost, and the records about the routes outlined in *Huanghua sida ji* are only to be found in passages in the treatise on “Geography” in *Xin tang shu* (*New History of the Tang Dynasty*). There were seven overseas routes from China recorded by Jia Dan<sup>6</sup>, five of which were land routes:
- the route from Yingzhou (current Chaoyang City) to Andong (in current Liaoning Province and Korean Peninsular);
  - the route from Outside Xiazhou (near current Yulin City) to Yunzhong, Datong (current Datong City and beyond the Great Wall);
  - the route from Middle Shouxiang City (near current Baotou City) to Huihu Kingdom (in Current Mongolia);
  - the route from Anxi (current Kuche City Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region) to the Xiyu (Western Regions, current Centurial Asia);
  - and the route from Annan (current Hanoi) to Tianzhu current India.
- 11 The other two routes are the sea-routes:
- the route from Dengzhou (current Penglai City) to the Gaoli Kingdom (Koayo, current Korean Peninsular) and Bohai Kingdom (in current Liaoning Province);
  - and the route from Guangzhou to Haiyi (foreign countries in the ocean, refers to the kingdoms around the ocean from south China Sea to the Indian Ocean).
- 12 These two routes contain significant information concerning maritime transportation during the Tang dynasty.
- 13 The maritime route from Guangzhou to Haiyi mentioned by Jia Dan in *Huanghua sida ji* specifies the stages of the routes and the times taken to travel these distances from Guangzhou to Baghdad:
- Having sailed southeast from Guangzhou for 200 li, the ship will reach Tuen Mun Hill (in today's south-western Kowloon, Hong Kong (Han Zhenhua 1988:30). Then steering to the west under full sail, it will arrive at Jiuzhou Rock (today's Qizhou islands) (ibid.) two days later. Sailing to the south for another two days, tone reaches Xiang Shi (literally, Elephant Rock, today's Tinhosa, Dazhou Island) (ibid.). Sailing to the southwest for a further three days brings one to Zhanbulao Hill (Culal Cham, now Cham Island, Vietnam) (Chen Jiarong 1986:280-281), which is located in the sea, 200 li east of the Huanwang Kingdom (Champa Kingdom). After that, the ship steers to the south for two days and reaches Lingshan Hill (Sa-hoi, now generally identified as the district of Qui Nhon on the south-eastern coast of Nghia Binh Province, Vietnam) (id., p. 156). After one more day of sailing, the ship reaches the Mendu Kingdom (now the eastern coast of Phú Khánh Province, Vietnam, i.e. the district near Cape Varella) (Li Jinming 2002). After another day, the ship will arrive in ancient Da Kingdom (Kauthara, identified as Hoa Khanh, Vietnam, some people think it is Nha Trang) (Han Zhenhua 1988:246). Steering for half a day brings one to Bentuolang Sandy Islet (Pandurang, Now Phan Rang, Vietnam) (id., p. 248).

After two further days, one reaches Juntunong Hill (today's Pulau Condor, Vietnam) (id., p. 365). After another five days of steering, one comes to a strait the Straits of Malacca (id., p. 518), which was called 'Selat' by foreigners. The strait is about 100 li from north to south with the Luoyue Kingdom (the southern end of the Malay Peninsula) (id., p. 514) on its northern coast and Foshi Kingdom (Palembang, Sri Vijaya) (id., p. 464) on the southern coast"<sup>7</sup> (fig. 6).

**Fig. 6. Map 1, the maritime route from Guangzhou to Haiyi recorded by Jia Dan in *Huanghua sida ji*, part one.**



**MAP BY AUTHOR**

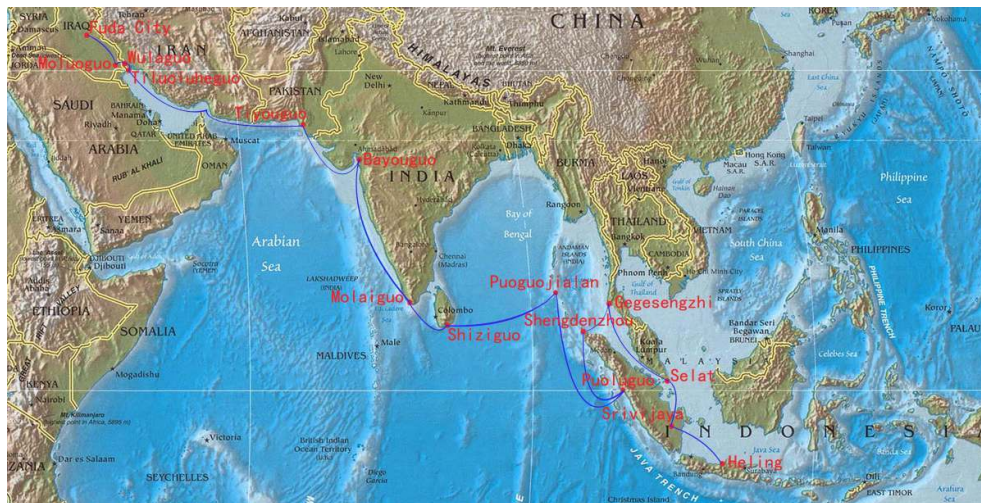
- 14 The first section of the passage set sail from Guangzhou, China, crossing South China Sea, sailing southwards along the east coast of Indo-china peninsula to Straits of Malacca. From there, two alternate routes are outlined (fig. 7).
- 15 The first route entails "sailing to the east from Sri Vijaya for four or five days, one arrives at the Heling Kingdom (Java, Indonesia) (id., p. 449; Xie Guang 1997:219), the largest kingdom in the Nanzhong Zhou (Southern central Land)." Following the second route, "again, the ship steers westward out of the strait (Straits of Malacca), and three days later arrives at the Gegesengzhi Kingdom (Brouwers Islands, in the southeast of the Straits of Sumatra) (id., p. 766; Ferrand 2002:56). An island in the northwest of Sri Vijaya, there are many pirates and the seamen are quite scared of them. On the northern coast is located Geluo Kingdom (Kalah, around Isthmus of Kra) (Ferrand, *ibid.*), and on the western coast of Geluo Kingdom is Geguluo Kingdom (now Langkavi Island). Thereafter, the ship sets sail again from Gegesengzhi and reaches Shengdeng Zhou (Aceh, northern Sumatra, Indonesia) (Han Zhenhua 1988:596; Ferrand 2002:59) after four or five days. With another five days' sailing to the west, the ship arrives in Polu Kingdom (Baros, in the north-west of the Indonesian Archipelago) (Han Zhenhua, *ibid.*, p. 734; Ferrand, *ibid.*, p. 60) and arrives at Poguojialan Zhou (Nicobar Islands, now part of India) (Han Zhenhua, *ibid.*, p.

738; Ferrand, *ibid.*, p. 60) after six days. Sailing north for four days brings the traveler to Lion Kingdom (Sri Lanka) (Han Zhenhua, *ibid.*; Ferrand, *ibid.*), the northern coast of which is 100 li away from the southern Indian coast.”<sup>8</sup>

16 From Sri Lanka, there are two routes:

- the first route cross the India Ocean to Red Sea or regions along the Gulf of Aqaba. This route is not recorded in the ancient texts. Early voyages may not be able to conduct such a long distance traveling. Therefore, it may be a later alternative;
- according to Huanghua sida ji, the second route “(Traveling from Sri Lanka) for four days to the west, passing Molai kingdom (Malabar in south of India or Quilon) (Han Zhenhua, *ibid.*, p. 738; Ferrand *ibid.*, p. 60), the southern end of Tianzhu Kingdom (now India southern part). After passing a dozen of small countries to the northwest reach the western region of Poluomen (south India) (Han Zhenhua, *ibid.*, pp. 734-735). Traveling northwest again for two days to Bajiu kingdom (mouth of Narbada river, around Broach) (*id.*, pp. 488-489). After traveling for ten days and passing five small kingdoms at the western region of Tianzhu (India) to Tiju kingdom (Diuli, Daibul of Karachi, Pakistan) (*id.*, p. 759), it has Milantai River or Xintou River (Indus River) (*id.*, p. 824) from the north Bokun, running westwards to the north of Tiju kingdom and flowing to the sea. From Tiju kingdom traveling to the west for 20 days, passing two dozens of small kingdoms, reach to Tiluo Luhe kingdom (Djerramh, near Abadan, Iran) (*id.*, p. 760). It is also known as Luoheyi kingdom. Its people erected an immense pillar in the sea, lighting torch at night, so that the sailor would not lose their way at night. Traveling westwards for a day, there is Wula [Ubolla, east of Basra (*id.*, p. 215), or Al-Ubullah at the end of the Gulf]<sup>9</sup>, where the Fulila River (Euphrates River) of Dashi flowing southwards to the sea. Change to a small boat and travel against the flow, reaching Moluo (Basra of Iraq) (*id.*, p. 237), and stronghold of Dashi. Traveling on road toward northwest for a thousand li to capital of Maomen King of Fuda [Baghdad, Iraq (*id.*, p. 825)]”<sup>10</sup>.

Fig. 7. Map 2, the maritime route from Guangzhou to Haiyi recorded by Jia Dan in *Huanghua sida ji*, part two.



MAP BY AUTHOR

- 17 This is a route from Sri Lanka to the south of India and travel along the west coast of Indian subcontinent to reach the Wula kingdom at the mouth of the Euphrates River, then transfer to a small boat to reach Baghdad. The voyage from Guangzhou to Baghdad took a total of 87 days.

- 18 This route recorded above was known as the route along “the eastern coast” during the Tang period, while the route bound along the northern part of Africa’s east coast to the Persian Gulf’s coastal areas was known as the route along “the western coast” (fig. 8). Jia Dan made a special effort to record “the western coast” route: sailing from Samran along Africa’s eastern coast to the Arabian Peninsula, then traveling along the peninsula’s eastern coast to enter the Persian Gulf and joining up with “the eastern coast” route in the Wula kingdom<sup>11</sup>. Samran was at the southern tip of “the western coast” route. There is still debate among the scholars as to the exact location of Samran<sup>12</sup>. Jia Dan described the route from south to north, and it took 48 days. Therefore, the possibility of Samran located in eastern Africa is very high. Archaeological discoveries of Tang period remains suggest Kilwa Island off Tanzania is the most probable location (Chitick 1974).
- 19 Jia Dan’s documentation has the most detailed record of the 9th to 10th century maritime routes. For the same period, there are also ancient texts written by Persian and Arabic scholars, such as *Kitāb al-Masālik wa’l- Mamālik* (litt. “The Roads and Districts of States”, translated into Chinese as *Daoli Bangguo Zhi*) by the Arab geographer Khurdādhbih writing during the period 846-885 CE<sup>13</sup>. Another text by al-Sīrāfi, Abū Zayd Ḥasan ibn Yazīd or an unknown author is *Kitāb Akhbor al-sinwa’ L-hind* (“The knowledge Records of India and China”, translated into Chinese as *Yindu Zhongguo Jianwenlu*), dated to the period from the mid-8th to the early 9th century<sup>14</sup>, and a third important text is *Murūj al-Dhahab wa m ‘ādin al-Jawhar* (“Meadows of Gold”, translated into Chinese as *Huangjin Caoyuan*) by the Arab traveler Al-mas ‘ūdi (late 9th century-956)<sup>15</sup>. All these Arabic texts record in detail maritime routes west of the Malacca Straits but they are not so detailed for the voyages east of the Malacca Straits, suggesting Arab travelers were less familiar with the latter. If we combine the information from Jia Dan’s document with that in the Arabic writings, it becomes clear that during the 9th -10th centuries or even later, there were three trading circles around the Indian Ocean: between China and Southeast Asia (mainly Sumatra and Java), between Southeast Asia and Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and between the Arabian area and east Africa (fig. 9). Sri Vijaya and Basra were the two key points of trading interchange that connected the three circles.

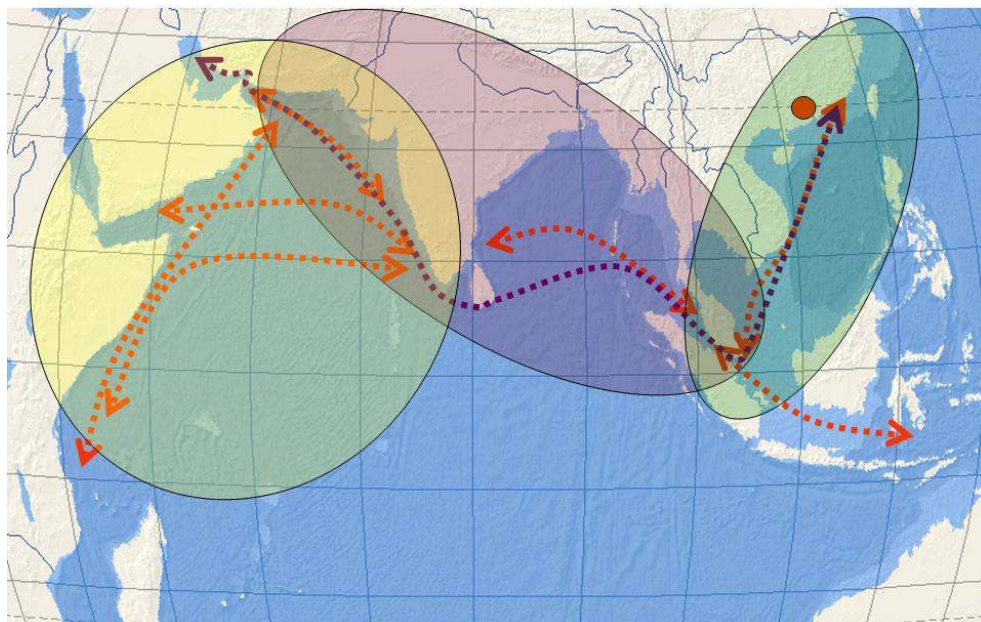


Fig. 8. Map 3, the maritime route from Guangzhou to Haiyi recorded by Jia Dan in Huanghua sida ji, part three.



MAP BY AUTHOR

Fig. 9. Map of three trading circles in the region from South China Sea to Indian Ocean



MAP BY AUTHOR

- 20 In ancient days, seagoing ships were so dependent on monsoon and direction that it took about two years to sail for a round trip from China to Baghdad. It was a long trip for traders and therefore maritime ships did not always travel the entire route from China to Arabia and Persian Gulf. Instead, Sri Vijaya served as a key trading entrepôt for traders from both sides of the Indian Ocean. Merchant ships from both China and the Persian Gulf ended their voyages in Sri Vijaya, where they loaded and unloaded their merchandise before making return trips to their home countries. The literature evidence for this comes from three sources:
- firstly, Jia Dan's *Huanghua sida ji* documented the maritime route between China and the Malacca Straits in such a detail level that it serves as a daily and sometimes even as half-day log of activities, but the details recorded of the voyage beyond the Malacca Straits were very sketchy and activities were only documented every five or six days and some were as far apart as ten or twenty days. Similarly, documents recorded by Arab geographers and travelers were very detailed for the maritime routes west of the Malacca Straits but less so for the voyages east of the Malacca Straits. One can therefore deduce from these documents that the people (mainly diplomats, traders and sailors) with whom the writers interacted seldom traveled the entire route, because they just need sail to the link point of two circles where they could finish their trade activities. Therefore, none of them could provide comprehensive details of the entire voyage. They could only provide detailed accounts for one of the two legs of the journey — either west or east of the Malacca Straits;
  - secondly, China and Sri Vijaya had a very close relationship. According to documentary records from *Song Shi* (*Song Dynasty History*), *juan* 489, “The record of Somboja (Sri Vijaya)” (*Song shi*, pp. 14 088-14 090). The Somboja kingdom (also known as Sri Vijaya in earlier years) sent official emissaries to pay tribute to the Song court on a total of 14 occasions in the period from 960-1008 CE, averaging one tribute mission every three years, and this reflected the close official relationship between the two kingdoms (Xia Xiurui 1988:21-28).
- 21 As recorded in *Tang Guoshi Bu* (p. 22), by Li Zhao, Tang Dynasty, “Southern Sea Ships are foreign ships, sailing Annan (Vietnam, part of Tang Dynasty) and Guangzhou yearly”. This shows that there were frequent contact among the people, and it is corresponding with the characteristic of relying on trade wind for one year a round trip. Some of the later documents also emphasized the strategic position of Sri Vijaya was to the trade. Zhou Qufei's *Ling wai dai da*, *juan* 2, stating that “Somboja was strategically located in such an important position in the ‘South Sea’ that traders of kingdoms from the east (such as the Javanese) or the west (such as the Arabs) needed to pass through Somboja in order to reach China” (p. 86). Somboja therefore became the most suitable entrepôt for Chinese merchandise. The merchandise from both side of the Straits of Malacca are willing to trade in this point and it became the Entrepôt by the continuing effort from the both side. It was also recorded on the stele of the Xiangying Temple in Putian County, Fujian Province, dated on the 8th year of the Shaoxing reign (1138 CE) “an admiral Zhu Fang lead his maritime ships from Quanzhou to Somboja, they sail fast and no much dangers. They made a round trip within a year and profited handsomely from their trading business. People before and after them trade to foreign countries could not compete theirs profits” (Jiang Weitan 1994:119). Although the record is in 12th century, this inscription indirectly re-affirms our argument that Chinese maritime ships did not sail the entire route from China to Persian Gulf that could take two years to



complete but instead ended their trip at Somboja, and thus were able to make a return trip within one year. And it is the most economical way to trade in South Sea;

- thirdly, it was clearly recorded in both Chinese and foreign documents that maritime trade at that time seldom came across trading products from a single location. According to a record from *Song shi* (*Song Dynasty History*), juan 489, “The record of Somboja (Sri Vijaya)”, during the period from 960 to 1 008 AD, Somboja emissaries offered many tribute items on their 14 missions, including ivory, rhinoceros horn, pearls, Baijin (probable electrum), frankincense, Polu Xunluxiang (a kind of cense), mastic, Qiangwei Shui (rose perfume)<sup>16</sup>, crystal, crystal ring, crystal Buddha statues, Buddhist sutras, memorial with gold inscriptions, Jinbu (a kind of clothes), oil for light, glass perfume bottles, coral, dates, peaches, granulated sugar and Kunlunnu (in Tang and Song periods, people coming from Africa were usually referred to as Kunlunnu. In this group of goods, pearls, coral and frankincense, etc. are originated in the Somboja area, some of the other products, such as glass perfume bottles, rhinoceros horn, dates and Kunlunnu, etc. came from the Middle East, West Asia and Africa. This clearly showed that as a trading entrepôt, where traders from all over the world, Somboja had an abundance of highly varied merchandise some of which were offered as local specialties tribute to the Song government. Similarly, documents from Arab scholars also record the same pattern. The scholar from Basra Al-Jahizi (776-868 CE), in a book he edited which was titled *Kitāb al-Tabassur Bil-tijara* (translated into Chinese as *Shangwu de guan cha*), documented a long list of merchandise imported to Baghdad from all over the world among which he identified silk, porcelain, paper, ink stick, saddle, sword, spices, musk, cinnamon and peacock which he described as all coming from China (Pellat 1954:245). Ibn Khurdadhbih enumerated the commodities shipped from China to Arab countries in *Kitāb al-Masalik wa'l-Mamalik* were white silk, colored silk fabrics, gold decorated brocade, porcelain, anaesthesia drug, musk, aloe wood, saddle, mink fur, cinnamon and ginger. From these two recourses mentioned above, we could realize that some of merchandise, like aloe wood, cinnamon and some spices were actually products of Southeast Asia but were mistakenly believed by the Arabs to come from China. This clearly demonstrates the effect of re-export business over time, whereby people lose track of the point of origin of particular items of merchandise. It was obvious that the Arab traders did not buy the imported merchandise directly from China. Instead, they must have bought the merchandise from Chinese traders in Sri Vijaya or it might have even been traded through the channels officially appointed by Sri Vijaya and, therefore, it was assumed that items such as cinnamon and aloe wood were also from China and recorded them as such.

- 22 Some scholars believe that Sri Vijaya’s success came mainly from having a comprehensive administration system. To facilitate maritime trading, the government centralized all kinds of local products, such as aloe wood, camphor, sanders, spice, ivory, tin and caryophyllus oil, etc. from the islands region in east Indonesia to Palembang. For this reason, they constructed warehouse facilities to store the goods. Merchandise from other regions including ceramics from China, glass perfume bottle from Middle East and Rose perfume from Persia were also stored in the same warehouse facilities. Therefore, traders from different parts of the world could transact their business in one location in the shortest time possible, instead of having to travel to many different locations. This allowed the traders to catch the monsoon season to return home or move on to their next destination. Sri Vijaya’s main source of income came from port entry and trading fees (Munoz 2006). From the documentary sources mentioned above, this pattern of trade clearly did exist and this is well corroborated by archaeological evidence.

## Sri Vijaya as a Trading Centre from an Archaeological Perspective

23 Sri Vijaya's establishment as a trading centre hinged on its unique geographical location, and this trading economic model clearly presented in archaeological materials:

- ceramics from the Changsha kilns in Hunan Province were major export items in the 9th century. Porcelain pieces from Changsha could be found at many sites in Sumatra and Java and yet few have been found in Indochina, particularly along its eastern coasts. This confirms Jia Dan's records that ships sailing from Guangzhou headed directly towards Sri Vijaya did not make stops along the route in places like Indochina to engage in trading. It was only in Sri Vijaya that merchants engaged in major trading. Therefore, they didn't do small sum trade in the early voyage in one by one stop. A few Changsha wares found in the south top of Vietnam, which were trade back from Palembang;

**Fig. 10. Changsha Ware bowls preserved and kept in large "Dusun" jars produced in Guangdong when it unwatered from Belitung shipwreck**



**PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL FLECKER**

- the recent find of the shipwreck in the seas off Belitung, named "Batu Hitam", which was treated as a typical type of ship constructed in the region of Siraf, Arabia (Flecker 2000:199-217), and in which has yielded over fifty thousand pieces of Changsha wares. It is dated as around A.D. 826. Changsha bowls account for a large proportion of the finds<sup>17</sup> and they are in perfect or mint condition as they were well preserved and kept in large "Dusun" jars produced in Guangdong (Guy 2005:9-20) (fig. 10). From Changsha Wares' production origins and archaeological studies undertaken in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province it can be ascertained that the major export port for Changsha Wares was Yangzhou in the

downstream section of the Yangtze River and the large “Dusun” jars produced in Guangzhou could only be exported from Guangzhou port itself. Among the 67 000 wares from the “Batu Hitam” were some white wares produced in northern China and green wares from the Yue kilns in Zhejiang Province. White wares from the north were also loaded on board from Yangzhou port but Yue Wares left the port from Mingzhou (now Ningbo in Zhejiang Province). In the past, there was a consensus among scholars that after the cargoes were loaded onto the “Batu Hitam” in Yangzhou, the ship then set sailed along China’s southeastern shore and called in at the ports of Mingzhou and Guangzhou to pick up more cargoes before heading for Southeast Asia, and that the vessel then sank en-route to Java or in the return voyage back to Arabia (*ibid.*). If this hypothesis were correct, what it meant was that the over 50 000 pieces of ceramics which were first loaded on board at Yangzhou had to be off loaded in Guangzhou, repackaged and then placed in large “Dusun” jars before heading for Java. The stopover in Mingzhou was merely to pick up the 200 or so Yue Wares celadon. This does not sound logical and reasonable. A more convincing and logical explanation was that the “Batu Hitam” ship actually came from Middle East and was loaded up with goods in Palembang and then sank on its way to Heling kingdom, Java. The cargoes on board the “Batu Hitam” were brought to Sri Vijaya by different ships coming from Yangzhou, Mingzhou and Guangzhou. We can therefore surmise that Palembang at that time had huge warehouses to store a large quantity of ceramics;

- the shipwreck found off Cirebon, Java sea, Indonesia exhibited a similar complexity of cargoes. The artifacts salvaged from the sunken ship included 350 000 or so ceramics of various kinds. Amongst them, green wares from the Yue kilns and exported from Mingzhou accounted for the majority of the ceramics (fig. 4 & 11). Others included a small quantity of white wares from Anhui and Henan, a large quantity of lead coins of Southern Han dynasty (capital was in Guangzhou), an unknown quantity of silver ingots, in batches of copper mirrors and small mouthed ceramic pots. There were also large quantities of tin ingots, tin bar shaped coins and tin spears shaped objects from the Malay Peninsula, fine paste ceramic *kundika* (fig. 12) vessels from Thailand, hundreds of perfume bottles (fig. 13) from Syria or Persian Gulf, a ton of raw material of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan or Burma, hundreds of rubies and sapphires from Sri Lanka and other items (Li Min 2007:78-79). If one were to accept the hypothesis that each cargo was loaded on board the ship from its place of origin, so that the white ceramic wares were loaded at Yangzhou, the largest quantities of goods among the cargo, Yue Wares from Mingzhou, lead coins and some “Dusun” jars from Guangzhou, the perfume bottles from the Middle East, merchandise from Sri Lanka and Thailand and so forth, the ship would have to make calls at more than ten ports before it could set sail for the final destination of Java. This seems irrational and illogical. Therefore, one could safely conclude that the cargo on the sunken ship was likely to be loaded at one port and it was most probably in Palembang, because Palembang was then the trading entrepôt for ships coming from East Africa, the Middle East, West Asia and Indochina, where ships with cargoes of all kinds were offloaded and then re-loaded with different cargoes before heading for their next destinations. Palembang then also had built large warehouses to store the multitude of goods in transit as evidenced by the capacity of the warehouses to store 350 000 over pieces of ceramics.

Fig. 11. Yue Ware celadon wares unwatered from Cirebon shipwreck



PHOTOGRAPHED BY AUTHOR

Fig. 12. Fine fabric earthen ware, *kundika* ewer



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MR. ADI AGONG

Fig. 13. Perfume bottles from Syria or Persian Gulf unwatered from Cirebon shipwreck.



PHOTOGRAPHED BY AUTHOR

- 24 Combining the considerations mentioned above and after some analysis, one realizes that the maritime trade around the Indian Ocean during the period from the 9th to the 10th century can be grouped into three trading circles: the circle between China and Southeast Asia (mainly Sumatra and Java), the circle between Southeast Asia and Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and that between the Arabian area and East Africa. (This is despite the fact that goods could be transported to far away places through indirect trade among the countries.) Evidence for the existence of these three routes is provided by the fact that Chinese ceramics from the 9th century have been found in East Africa. Sri Vijaya was the centre of interchange for the first and second trade routes during the period from the 9th to the 10th century and there cargoes from different parts of the world were un-loaded, traders transacted their business, ships were reloaded with new cargoes and then caught the right monsoon to head home. This was Sri Vijaya of the 9th to the 10th century, a vibrant and booming cosmopolitan urban center.

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## NOTES

1. The Idemitsu team of Japan investigated Chinese ceramics unearthed from Fustat site in 1964 and 1966, they reported that there were 25 pieces shards of Yaozhou Ware been found in the site (Yuba Tadanori 2008:97).
2. In ancient Chinese texts, Nanhai (southern sea) refers to the region of Southeast Asia to West Asia, and sometimes even to Middle East.
3. *Da Tang Xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan* 1988.
4. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography), p. 1146.
5. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 58, « Yiwen Zhi » (Monograph on Literature), p. 1056.
6. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography), p. 1146.
7. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography), p. 1153.
8. *Id.*, pp. 1153-1154.
9. Regarding Hormuz and Siraf, please refer to Han Zhenhua 1999. See also Li Jinming 2002.
10. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography), p. 1154.
11. *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography): “From south of Poluomen and Molai kingdom to Wula, all *Xin Tang Shu*, juan 43, “Dili Zhi” (Geography): “From south of Poluomen and Molai kingdom to Wula, all coast route is Samran. Traveling from Samran towards the due north for 20 days, passing a dozen of small kingdoms, to She kingdom (Shihr, Yemen). For another ten days, passing six to seven small kingdoms to Sayiquhejie kingdom (Kalhat of Oman). This is the west of the coast. Traveling westwards for six to seven days, passing six to seven small kingdoms to Moxun kingdom (Sohar Harbor, Oman). Traveling northwest for ten days, passing a dozen of kingdoms to Baligemonan kingdom (Bahrain). For another day to Wula kingdom, joining up with the east coast route” (p. 1154).
12. Some researchers suggested it is in today's Yemen, also known as Aden (Zhang Guangda 1987:743-801). Some of them suggested Dar es Salaam of Tanzania, this is accepted by major of the researchers now (Cen Zhongmian 1962; Chen Jiarong, Xie Fang & Lu Junling 1986).
13. *Liber viarum et Regnorum*.
14. *Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde*.
15. *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*.
16. About Qiangwei Shui, Yang Zhishui (2004) engaged in textual research and approved that it referred to the perfume produced in Persia (the old name of Iran).
17. The total number of registered objects unwated under the excavation from the wreck are around 67 000 pieces (Flecker 2002:101).

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## RÉSUMÉS

Les IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles virent la naissance du commerce maritime chinois. Dès cette époque, de nombreux ports le long de la côte chinoise expédièrent des biens provenant de différentes régions du sud comme du nord de la Chine. Mais ces marchandises n'étaient pas envoyées directement à leur destination finale. Elles passaient par un entrepôt dans l'océan Indien, entre la Chine et le monde arabe.

Les documents arabes et chinois du X<sup>e</sup> siècle nous apprennent que dès le IX<sup>e</sup> siècle, le commerce s'effectuait par zones circulaires : l'aire de la Chine à l'Asie du sud-est, une autre entre l'Asie du sud-est et l'Arabie et le golfe Persique, une dernière entre le monde arabe et l'Afrique orientale.

Les deux entrepôts les plus importants étaient celui du Sri Vijaya et celui de Bassorah. Selon les archives, la Chine et Sri Vijaya entretenaient une relation étroite. Les documents chinois et arabes font apparaître des produits venant d'Asie du sud-est. Ces textes relevant des itinéraires sont mieux documentés pour le canal de Malacca qu'ils ne le sont pour l'autre côté. Les cargaisons des épaves de Belitung et de Ceribon contiennent des produits de tout l'océan Indien, ce qui porte à penser que le commerce maritime des IX-X<sup>e</sup> siècles de l'océan Indien trouvait dans Palembang (Sri Vijaya) un centre fondamental de diffusion.

9th-10th century was the first peak of China maritime trade. Many ports along the coast of China engaged in this period, traded commodities from different regions of southern and northern China. But, the ports were not selling the goods directly to the end users. There was an entrepôt in India Ocean between China and Arabian area.

According to the Chinese and Arab records in 10th century, we learnt that since 9th-10th century there were three trading circles around the Indian Ocean: Between China and Southeast Asia, between Southeast Asia and Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and between the Arabian area and east Africa.

Sri Vijaya and Basra were the two main entrepôts. According to documentary records, China and Sri Vijaya had a very close relationship. Chinese and Arab records of commodities both contain products from Southeast Asia. Their texts on trade route show more details on the side of Malacca Straits they were familiar with than they do on the other side. The cargoes from the shipwrecks of Belitung and Ceribon all contain products from around India Ocean. This shows that during 9th-10th century, the mode of maritime trade in Indian Ocean was in the form of centering in Palembang, Sri Vijaya, where the trade of East and West mainly conducted here.

## INDEX

**Keywords :** Chinese Wares, Sri Vijaya, Kilns, South-East Asia, Malacca straits, Shipwrecks, Persian Gulf, Palembang, Trade, East Africa

**Mots-clés :** poteries chinoises, Srivijaya, commerce, épaves, fours, Asie du Sud-Est, détroit de Malacca, golfe Arabo-Persique, Palembang, Afrique de l'Est